

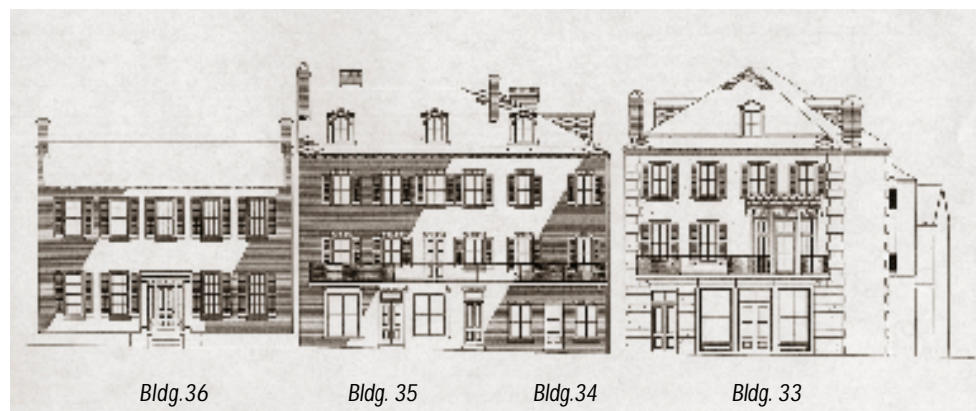
The Architectural Program of Harpers Ferry NHP

Evolution, Accomplishments, Expectations

During the past 40 years (1956–1996) Harpers Ferry National Historical Park (Harpers Ferry NHP) has been engaged in a concerted effort to preserve its architectural resources for public interpretation. Historic buildings, landscape features, and ruin sites which were previously unsafe, dilapidated, or off limits are now open to the visitor after the completion of ambitious projects. According to the program schedule, the Shenandoah Street buildings (1996) are in a state of stabilization and almost completely restored. The interpretive scope is expanding preservation efforts beyond the heavily visited Lower Town into Virginus Island, the Potomac River cultural resources, and to the Upper Town on Camp Hill. New Parking and Visitor Center Facilities on Cavalier Heights accommodate the 500,000 visitors who come to Harpers Ferry NHP each year. Plans for future design and construction activities continue and are scheduled beyond the year 2000 into the first decade of the 21st century.

Harpers Ferry NHP project accomplishments have forged strong bonds between the park and the NPS Service Centers. The park's cultural resource, maintenance, and administration staffs have been working closely with the Denver Service Center, Williamsport Preservation Training Center, Harpers Ferry Center, and HABS/HAER (just to name a few partners) during planning, field research, design, and construction phases of the park's architectural development for more than 20

*Shenandoah Street rehabilitation—
Package 116.
Preservation construction,
1994–1996.
Drawing by Archie Franzen.*



Associated Professional Offices
Denver Service Center (DSC)
Williamsport Preservation Training Center (WPTC)
Harpers Ferry Center (HFC)
Northeast Cultural Resource Center (NECRC)
National Capital Area Systems Support Office (NCA)
Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)
Historic American Engineering Record (HAER)
West Virginia University's Institute for Historic Technology and Industrial Archaeology
WASO—NPS Washington Office
A&E Firms—From NCA, DSC, and/or in contract with the park for Engineering, Architectural, and hazardous waste consulting services.
State Historic Preservation Offices—from the States of Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia.

years (see box). The park has an advantage in that most of the offices listed above are within an hour's drive of Harpers Ferry, thus generating a relatively rapid response for project needs. Therefore, design and construction related cultural resource services are possible from several local sources.

The park also has the benefit of a multi-disciplinary cultural resources staff which includes expertise in the areas of history, curation, archeology, and landscape architecture. The availability of these staff members allows them to play active roles in the architectural program by accomplishing certain parts of project work in-house and participating in the lengthy review processes for work contracted to the allied professional offices. Having an architect on site in the park has also helped to achieve a har-

mony between design plans and construction activities. In so doing, the park has saved an enormous sum of money that would otherwise have been spent on taking plans developed outside the park and revising them to suit local conditions.

The Harpers Ferry NHP Architectural Development Program is organized into a system of Packages, each with a separate

Major Harpers Ferry NHP Architectural Packages which are either finished, or under construction, design, and planning at present.

Package 110: Rehabilitation of Buildings 8, 9, 10, 11, 11A, 12, and 12A, with mechanical system in 16A; Lower Town.

Package 114: Cavalier Heights Visitor Center, Park Entrance Road, Visitor Parking Area, and Bus Storage Facility; surrounding landscape.

Package 115: Rehabilitation of Buildings 3, 14, 27, 28, 40, and 43 in Lower Town.

Package 116: Rehabilitation of Buildings 32, 33, 33A, 34, 34A, 35, and 36 and surrounding landscape, south side of Shenandoah Street, in Lower Town.

Package 118: Preservation and Stabilization of Buildings 5, 7, and 16/16A and immediate surrounding landscape in Lower Town.

Package 119: Preservation and Rehabilitation of Buildings 44 and 45, Lower Town; and Buildings 56, 57, & 58 with landscape, Upper Town.

Package 123: Stabilization of Historic Industrial Ruins on Virginius Island.

Package 212: Stabilization of Historic B&O Railroad Bridge Piers Ruins in the Potomac River.

Package 313: New John Brown Museum Facility; Buildings 9, 10, and 11, Lower Town. Harpers Ferry NHP 50th Anniversary Project - July 2, 1994.

Package 320: Landscape Development for Lower Town, Virginius Island, and park general.

Cyclical Maintenance: Annual repair and replacement projects from regional appropriations, affecting any park buildings or utilities prioritized by park maintenance.

Flood/Storm Recovery: Repairs to Lower Town buildings and exhibits are necessary in the aftermath of the January 1996 flooding. Prioritize and enact Packages 123 and 212 to finally stabilize and protect the river shoreline ruins which are so susceptible to flood damages.

(see map, page 9)

"Development/Study Package Proposal" (the 10-238 form for park projects) and identification number, and comprised of clusters of building groups, landscape features, or specific ruins needing stabilization. Each Package is scheduled and funded according to the necessary phases and steps including research, archeology, historic landscape reports, historic structures reports, measured drawings of existing conditions, artifact and materials conservation, exhibits, historic furnishings, 106 compliance, planning, engineering, preliminary design, contract documents, contracting, construction, and post construction. The park's Architectural Projects necessarily involve a wide variety of different professionals committed to a "total approach" method dedicated to creating a thorough process for a complete product. It is no wonder then that these Packages are planned for a duration of many years, typically spanning 4-5 years from the inception of 10-238 and appropriation of funds from Congress up to final completion of construction, exhibits, and public admission.

From the list in the box, Packages 114, 115, and 313 are finished. Package 116 is under construction and scheduled for completion by summer 1996, with exhibits and historic furnishings to follow thereafter. Packages 118, 123, and 320—portions of these projects have been completed, and subsequent phases are being planned for the future whenever funding becomes available.

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park is in many ways a laboratory of evolving architectural restoration techniques. During the park's 52 years three or four separate generations of professionals have influenced its attitudes toward architectural preservation. During the 1940s and 1950s there was a concerted effort to demolish all old dilapidated buildings within the park boundaries declared unsafe or unsuitable for the adopted interpretive period of 1859-1865. The time of 1955-1975 might be considered the Harpers Ferry NHP "Reconstruction & Restoration Age," when the date of 1859—the year of the John Brown Raid—became the recreative focus for all proposed and accomplished park projects. The late 1970s inaugurated the period of "Rehabilitation & Restoration," where buildings were converted to exhibits and furnished scenes on the first floors, working offices and utility rooms above, and the exteriors repaired to assume a 19th-century appearance which would safeguard most of their existing features from that time. (An example of this philosophy is seen in Package 110 which houses the park's John Brown Museum located at the corner of Shenandoah and Potomac streets.)

However, beginning in the early 1990s there has emerged another current strongly in favor of "Preservation & Stabilization" with intent to limit



Package 116, Sept. 1995. Masonry restoration in progress on buildings 32 and 33, Lower Town.

Harpers Ferry NHP, Denver Service Center, National Capital Region (now SSO), Harpers Ferry Center, and various allied A&E firms.

PACKAGE 118: Much less ambitious in scope when compared to Package 116, the three small buildings in Package 118 (5, 7, and 16/16A in Lower Town) do not have the square foot areas capable of multiple reuse and contain so much valuable early to mid-19th century fabric that stabilization for preservation intact has been adopted. Here the park and the Williamsport Preservation Training Center aim at conservation of all the delicate building materials—specifically interior plaster, exterior stucco, paint, and graffiti—in order to maintain as much as possible the “virgin” condi-

tion of the remains. Much of previous preservation work on the three buildings from the 1970s and 1980s was done inadequately, either never achieving its intended purpose or never finished. The scope of Package 118 will be to finish the repair of existing building problems, limit the intrusion of new electrical and Life Safety features, restrict public access and personnel use, and provide simple furnishings for interpretation. This effort to preserve the buildings by stabilizing them and limiting more intrusive forms of fabric intervention represents a fundamental change in direction for the park’s architectural program.

Harpers Ferry National Historical Park will be very busy over the next five years with its program of recovery from the 1996 flood and work on existing and proposed Construction Packages. Looking beyond these projects, Harpers Ferry NHP can branch out in several new directions for future work. New opportunities for architectural work exist in the area of the armory grounds along the Potomac River, on Camp Hill where there is enormous potential for the restoration and interpretation of Storer College which played an important regional role in educating African-American students, and on Cavalier Heights where the park would relish the chance to expand its visitor center facilities. The emphasis at the beginning of the 21st century will be to move restoration and development projects outside of the heavily visited Lower Town and into other areas of the park. There are many historical sites on the park perimeter which are in need of protection and restoration designed to improve visitor access.

Package 119, which includes the park’s “Crown Jewel” Greek Revival buildings on Camp Hill that presently house park headquarters and professional staff offices, represents yet another exciting future restoration opportunity for the park. The scope, schedule, and cost of 119 will probably equal what the National Park Service has experienced with Package 116, the precedents of the latter establishing a foundation of experience which will improve park planning. To date, the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) has completed 60 mylar sheet measured drawings of buildings 45, 48, 56, 57, and 58, during two summer field seasons, 1994 and 1995. With HABS documentation, the Package 119 buildings are on record until the time within the next decade when, hopefully, funding will permit attention to their preservation.

Peter Dessauer is a licensed architect on loan from the NPS Denver Service Center to Harpers Ferry NHP since 1992.

Photos by the author.

Map of the Lower Town showing a portion of the old armory grounds along the Potomac River. Map produced by the Harpers Ferry Historical Association.

